DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 278 114 EA 019 111

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TITLE Reforming Texas Education through Legislation: The Experience of Texas Teachers.
PUB DATE Nov 86
NOTE 25p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Ladders; Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; *Minimum Competency Testing; Predictor Variables; State Legislation; State Surveys; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS *Texas

ABSTRACT

A Texas committee on educational reform held hearings in 1984 on the implementation of career ladder and teacher competency testing plans. These reforms were enacted by the legislature late that year. In the spring of 1984, 1985, and 1986, three surveys were undertaken to determine how teachers felt about these reforms as proposed and later enacted. Each survey was sent to a separately selected random sample of 2000 teachers, and each was returned by over 700 respondents. Each survey was 60 items long and requested demographic information as well as indications (on a Likert-type scale) of the teachers' attitudes toward the reforms and their efforts. This report reviews the literature, describes the study methodology, and presents 16 tables displaying the major findings in terms of the percentages agreeing with, disagreeing with, or undecided about specified propositions each year. The teachers supported the concept of competency testing for preservice teachers and were generally opposed to the career ladder plan. Their opposition to both reforms grew with experience. The teachers reported that the reforms increased stress and decreased morale. The paper also comments briefly on the few relationships found between selected demographic variables and responses to the reforms. (PGD)

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REFORMING TEXAS EDUCATION THROUGH LEGISLATION

THE EXPERIENCE OF TEXAS TEACHERS

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November, 1986

EA 019 111

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REFORMING TEXAS EDUCATION THROUGH LEGISLATION
THE EXPERIENCE OF TEXAS TEACHERS

Reform in education has been one of the highest priority issues at both the national and state level during the 1980s. In "A Nation At Risk," the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) stated,

> " . . . the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity. What was unimaginable a generation has begun to occur -- others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments."

Recommendations for improvement included an effective evaluation system for salary, promotion, tenure and retention decisions. The report suggested that, "School boards, administrators, and teachers should cooperate to develop career ladders for teachers. . ."(National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

The number one action recommendation of the Task Force on Education for Economic Growth (1983) was, "Develop -- and put into effect as promptly as possible -- state plans for improving education in the public schools from kindergarten through grade 12." These statements were made in assessing the problems of education in the United States.

Review of the Literature

Gallup (1984) conducted a survey to determine teacher attitudes and to establish a base point of teacher attitudes from which to measure change through subsequent surveys. Questionnaires were mailed to 2,000 teachers in the Spring of 1984. A total of 813 (41%) were completed and returned. Gallup found remarkable similarity of attitude among the nine teacher subgroups by which the data were analyzed. Differing views were noted only between elementary and secondary teachers and then, only rarely. Teacher attitudes and public attitudes differed, however, on two-thirds of the issues. Teachers opposed the idea of merit pay by a 2-1 ratio. Two primary objections to merit pay were noted: 1) difficulty in evaluation of teachers to determine who should receive merit pay and 2) morale problems created by merit pay. This contrasted sharply with the public's view. The public favored merit pay for teachers by a 4-1 ratio. Approximately 63 % of teachers and 89 % of the public believed a state board subject examination should be required for initial teacher certification.

In the second part of the study, Gallup (1985) reported that teachers were more reluctant to recommend teaching to their sons (31 % yes vs 59 % no) than to their daughters (43 % yes vs 46 % no). When asked to rank teaching among eleven other professions on the amount each contributes to the good of society, 59 % of

the teachers gave their profession the highest rating. When asked to rank the same twelve professions according to prestige in society, only 1 % ranked teaching highest.

Both Popham (1984) and Sandefur (1984) see the teacher competency testing movement of the 1980s as a natural extension of the student competency testing begun in the 1970s. The public believed that educators could not be depended upon to assure literacy among high school graduates. The logical extension of the public's belief that many high school graduates were not competent in the basic skills was that perhaps the teachers were not competent either. Thus, if competency of students can be assured by legislated statewide tests, why not test teacher competency? These teacher competency tests tend to be either exit examinations taken after completion of a teacher education program and before certification or a screening test focusing on the basic skills before admission to a teacher education program. Sandefur found that by 1982, thirty-six states had some form of teacher competency testing.

The Southern Regional Educational Board (1986) stated, "Career ladder programs to reward teachers and school administrators -- an idea that originated in the SREB region -- have mushroomed across the nation in the last two years." They believe that in most SREB states, the debate has shifted from whether career ladder programs will be tried to how to make programs work.

Henderson and Henderson (1986) conducted a survey of Texas State Teacher Association members biannually from 1980 through 1986. The percentage of teachers who are seriously considering leaving the profession increased from 38.4 % in 1980 to 41.7 percent in 1986. (It should be noted that the change was within the survey's error rate.) Only 14.3 % of the teachers indicated that they were satisfied with the current career ladder program, while 83.2 % were dissatisfied. The upward shift in those planning to leave the profession coincided with the implementation of educational reform in Texas.

Educational Reform in Texas

In the Fall of 1983, the Governor of Texas, Mark White, appointed a select committee, chaired by H. Ross Perot. The charge to the committee was to study the problems of public education in Texas and to propose reform measures. Reports of the committee's work dominated the media throughout the year. That report (Select Committe on Public Education, 1984) became the basic document for reform measures written by the Texas Legislature in its special session on educational reform called by the governor in the Summer of 1984.

Research Method and Results

Three surveys of Texas classroom teacher's attitudes with respect to these reforms were conducted. The first survey was conducted in the Spring of 1984 during the hearing process conducted by the Select Committee and prior to the passage of reform legislation. The second survey was conducted in the Spring of 1985 as some of the reform measures began to impact elementary and secondary educational processes. The third survey was conducted in the Spring of 1986 after educational reforms had been in place for a year. This was immediately prior to the Texas Examination of Current Administrators and Teachers (TECAT). The results of these three surveys formed the only extensive statewide data base of Texas teacher's perceptions before and after implementation of legislative reform.

Each survey consisted of a random selection of 2000 Texas classroom teachers drawn by computer from the active teacher list of the Texas Education Agency for the mail survey. A total of 834 useable surveys were returned in 1984, 737 in 1985 and 810 in 1986. These return rates produced an error rate within + or - 4 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

The original survey instrument, developed by the authors, included items based upon input from teachers, graduate students and undergraduate students in the Division of Education at Midwestern State University. The instrument was pretested in the

Wichita Falls, Texas, Independent School District and in education classes at Midwestern State University. The revised survey was then mailed to the Texas teacher sample. The 1985 and 1986 surveys were based upon the 1984 survey with new items developed to measure the impact of legislative reform. The 1985 and 1986 survey instruments were also pretested in the above manner and the revised versions were mailed to the respective survey samples. Each survey instrument was sixty items long. They were primarily composed of five point Likert type items, demographic questions and two or three open ended questions at the end of each instrument. In addition, there was an inordinate amount of written response from teachers, comments written from a basic position, that, finally somebody was asking their opinion.

Analysis of data was accomplished using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Data was eventually collapsed from a five point scale to a three point scale in order to simplify presentation material for graphics. Graphs were then produced using color Fastgraphs which were photographed for 35 mm slides.

Reform Methods

Two of the most frequently recommended methods for improving the quality of education in the public schools are teacher competency testing and some form of merit pay. This paper investigated the reaction of classroom teachers to these two techniques for

improvement. Teachers responded on a five point Likert scale to a series of questions dealing with the Texas career ladder (an approach to merit pay) and to questions relating to the testing of pre-service and inservice teachers as well as questions designed to reflect the morale of Texas teachers. Results of selected items were crosstabulated with questions concerning morale, length of service, stress, sex, size of school and teaching assignment level.

Competency Testing

The basic question asked by most educational reformers is, are teachers competent? One method for determining the competency of teachers as well as for improving teacher competency has been an examination. There are three logical points at which the competency of educators might be examined; prior to admission to a teacher education program, prior to certification, and the examination of teachers after they have been employed.

In all three years of the Texas Teacher Survey, teachers were asked to respond to the statement, "College students should have to pass a basic skills competency test to enter the teacher education program." Teachers generally gave the same response in each of the three years of the survey. The responses were as follows:

Table 1 ENTRY LEVEL COMPETENCY TEST

	1984	1985	1986
Agree	85.2	88.3	88.1
Undecided	5.3	4.7	4.8
Disagree	8.0	5.8	6.9

Clearly, there was strong support among current teachers for the idea of pre-entry competency testing.

There was also general agreement among Texas teachers in support of the second logical point for examination of teachers, prior to certification. In all three years, teachers responded as follows, to the statement, "Beginning teachers should have to pass a competency test in their subject fields before they are certified to teach."

Table 2 BEGINNING TEACHER CERTIFICATION TEST

	1984	1985	1986
Agree	80.0	78.8	78.5
Undecided	8.4	7.6	7.7
Disagree	10.2	13.0	13.7

Teachers did not approve of testing at the third level, those already employed. In 1984, teacher testing was being debated in Texas. By 1985, the Texas Legislature had written teacher competency testing into law in the form of HB 72. The 1986 survey was conducted just prior to actual testing of teachers and administrators. Not only did teachers disagree with testing, the closer they came to the testing date, the more they expressed

opposition. They responded as follows to the statement, "Teachers who currently hold teaching certificates and are currently employed should be given competency examinations."

Table 3 TEST CURRENT TEACHERS

	1984	1985	1986
Agree	23.0	11.7	11.1
Undecided	17.0	10.6	5.7
Disagree	58.3	77.2	82.6

Not only did disagreement go up each year, but the proportion who were undecided decreased. Numerous comments written on questionnaires suggested teachers resented what they considered the violation of their "Life" certificates and the general lack of respect for the profession.

Opposition to the TECAT test did not come from a group feeling that teachers could not pass the test. In 1986, just prior to the test, teachers were asked to respond to the statement, "I expect to pass the teacher competency test." Some 92.3 % expected to pass while 5.8% were not sure and only 1.2 % expected to fail. In reality, some 94.8 % actually passed the first administration of the exam and as of September 1986 all but 0.7 % had passed the TECAT on either the first or subsequent administrations.

Career Ladder

A second more expensive major thrust of educational reform in Texas has been the implementation of a form of merit pay. This took the form of a four step career ladder. The basis for placement on the career ladder was an evaluation instrument initially developed by each school district within guidelines from the Texas Education Agency. School districts had less than a year to develop an evaluation instrument and procedure before they began placing teachers on the career ladder. The net result was a lack of uniformity among school districts. Additionally, a great deal of paperwork and time was devoted to evaluation by teams of administrators and teachers. This was time that teachers were not devoting to the classroom. Since the initial implementation of the process, the Texas Education Agency has developed a state-wide, standardized evaluation procedure. Evaluators are currently being provided extensive training in the use of the instrument. This has not eliminated the extensive paper work which has been a major complaint of teachers as a result of the implementation of HB 72.

Because of complaints voiced by teachers, the researchers decided to ask teachers state-wide if they thought that the evaluation process would work and if they expected to be correctly placed on the career ladder. In 1986, teachers were asked to respond to the following statement, "The evaluation procedure adequately assessed my teaching performance." Some 35.6 % of teachers agreed while 13.0 % were undecided and 50.7%

disagreed.

The next statement was actually modified between 1985 and 1986 due to the fact that teachers had not yet been placed on the career ladder. In 1985, the statement read, "I expect to be appropriately placed on the career ladder system." In 1986, the statement read, "I was appropriately place on the career ladder system." The results were as follows:

Table 4 APPROPRIATE PLACEMENT - LADDER

	1985	1986
Agree	59.3	63.8
Undecided	17.6	12.8
Disagree	21.6	21.0

There was not a great deal of difference between expectations in 1985 and reality in 1986. The undecided felt better about the process in 1986 but the level of disagreement was nearly the same for each year.

There was virtually no shift in opinion when teachers responded to the statements dealing with the career ladder as a reward for teacher competence. In 1985, teachers were asked to respond to the statement, "The career ladder system will reward the most competent teachers." In 1986, teachers were asked to respond to the statement," The career ladder system rewards the most competent teachers." The results for the two years are as follows :

Table 5 LADDER REWARDS MOST COMPETENT

	1985	1986
Agree	11.0	11.6
Undecided	18.5	16.8
Disagree	70.3	71.1

In all three years, teachers were asked to evaluate the impact of a differential pay system, i.e. merit pay, on the quality of education. In 1984, before the creation of the career ladder, teachers were asked to respond to the statement, "I believe that merit pay would lead to increased quality in education in my public school?" The statement was changed in 1985 and 1986 to read, "The career ladder system will lead to increased quality in education in my public school." Responses for the three years were as follows:

Table 6 LADDER LEADS TO QUALITY

	1984	1985	1986
Agree	19.4	11.9	12.0
Undecided	19.9	20.1	18.9
Disagree	59.2	67.3	69.0

When the questions were the same in 1985 and 1986, the responses were the same within given error rate. The career ladder was less acceptable to teachers as was the general concept of merit pay. Clearly, teachers do not like the career ladder system.

Perhaps of more interest is the fact that there is general agreement on the correct placement on the ladder, but the teachers felt that the ladder missed its intended purpose. Even though teachers believed that they were appropriately placed, they did not believe that the system either rewarded competent teachers or improved educational quality. Perhaps teachers are saying that even if the merit model were perfect, it would not meet the needs of teachers nor would it motivate them. Additionally, morale may be so low among Texas Teachers that they don't perceive merit as a solution to their problems.

Teacher Morale, Stress and Motivation

A fundamental principle of education, and indeed any work place, is that in order to improve performance one must feel encouraged. Conversely, if a person becomes discouraged, then

performance suffers. This is true for students in the classroom and surely it is no less true of the teachers. If educational reform is to work, then teachers must not only have a good opinion of the reform, but they must feel encouraged that the reform is having a positive impact upon them and their students.

In the third year of the study, teachers were asked to respond to the statement, "Since the institution of educational reform, teacher morale has..." The responses were as follows:

Table 7 TEACHER MORALE

	1986
Increased	2.7
Stayed the Same	4.2
Decreased	92.2

In addition, in two of the three years, 1985 and 1986, teachers were asked to respond as follows to the statement, "Compared to the last year, the amount of stress I have experienced this year has..."

Table 8 TEACHER STRESS

	1985	1986
Increased	86.0	86.0
Stayed the Same	7.9	8.9
Decreased	5.8	4.7

In all three years of the survey, teachers responded to the

statement, "During your tenure as a teacher do you believe that teacher motivation to achieve has. . ." Responses were as follows:

Table 9 TEACHER MOTIVATION

	1984	1985	1986
Increased	27.0	28.2	25.8
Stayed the Same	28.1	24.4	20.4
Decreased	44.4	46.7	53.1

Unfortunately the morale question was asked only in 1986, but obviously morale was low as it related to reform. In 1985 and 1986, teachers were saying that stress was increasing. Stress was further indicated by the numerous comments written on the questionnaires. That stress surely had an impact upon morale which became worse as reform measures were implemented. Apparently, in spite of a great increase in stress and decrease in morale, teachers still wanted to believe that they were motivated to do their basic job.

Three additional indirect indicators of morale were asked in each year of the survey. The responses should give some indication of the trend in feelings among teachers as reform was implemented.

First, teachers were asked to respond to the statement, "I would recommend to my child that he or she enter the teaching field." Responses were as follows:

Table 10 RECOMMEND TEACHING TO MY CHILD

	1984	1985	1986
Agree	25.2	17.9	14.3
Undecided	21.1	19.9	19.1
Disagree	53.3	61.3	65.9

Clearly there was a shift to the negative as reforms were implemented over the three year period.

Second, teachers were asked to respond to the statement, "If I had it to do over I would enter the teacher profession again," Responses were as follows:

Table 11 I WOULD TEACH AGAIN

	1984	1985	1986
Agree	53.7	47.2	33.3
Undecided	17.0	18.6	21.2
Disagree	28.0	33.8	44.8

Here, there was a decrease in agree responses from more than one half to one third. Those who disagreed became more certain of their disinclination to re-enter teaching.

Finally, teachers were asked to respond to the statement, "Do you plan to leave the teaching profession before regular retirement." Responses were as follows:

Table 12 DO YOU PLAN TO LEAVE TEACHING

	1984	1985	1986
Yes	21.4	28.2	29.0
No	37.8	32.8	26.4
Undecided	40.7	38.0	43.8

Here, there was a general shift in those who planned to leave the profession and that shift took place between the time of reform planning (1984) and the time when the teachers learned the real nature of reform (1985).

In all three of these questions, the absolute values are not as interesting as the relative values. There is no reason to believe that 29 % of the teachers will leave the profession early and certainly those who do may not be leaving just due to reform. However, in these three questions there is a trend which points to increasing dissatisfaction with the role of the teacher in the educational process. This trend parallels the implementation of educational reform in Texas.

Public Support and Student Achievement

Two final issues were addressed which concerned public perception and student achievement. First, teachers were asked for their perception of the respect that the public has for the profession. Second, teachers were asked for their perception of parental support for student achievement and problem resolution.

In each of the three years, teachers responded as follows to

the question, "Do you believe that the public's respect for teachers has generally... "

Table 13 RESPECT FOR TEACHERS

	1984	1985	1986
Increased	6.5	9.8	5.2
Stayed the Same	17.5	30.5	20.7
Decreased	75.6	59.2	73.8

Apparently, the increased public attention brought about by the reform legislation gave teachers an expectation that public respect had increased. Once the reforms were in place, teacher's perception of public respect returned to the pre-reform level.

The ultimate question is whether or not reform has led to increased student achievement. In 1986, teachers responded to the statement, "Student achievement has improved in my school as a result of Texas educational reform." Responses were as follows:

Table 14 REFORM IMPROVED ACHIEVEMENT

	1986
Agree	11.6
Undecided	24.3
Disagree	63.5

The impact was perceived by teachers as minimal.

One explanation for the lack of a significant impact may well

lie in teacher perception of support from parents. This was an area which was not addressed by educational reform in Texas, but it is an area where more agreement was found among teachers than in any other part of the survey.

In all three years, teachers were asked to respond to the statement, "A major problem with student achievement is lack of parental support for academic achievement." Responses were as follows:

Table 15 PARENTAL SUPPORT FOR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

	1984	1985	1986
Agree	94.5	92.9	93.6
Undecided	2.3	2.4	2.3
Disagree	3.1	4.3	3.7

In addition, teachers were asked to respond to the statement, "A major problem with student achievement is lack of parental support in resolving discipline problems." Responses were as follows:

Table 16 PARENTAL SUPPORT FOR DISCIPLINE

	1984	1985	1986
Agree	93.0	91.6	93.2
Undecided	3.7	2.7	2.8
Disagree	3.1	5.2	3.6

Selected Crosstabulations

In addition to the univariate analysis above, selected crosstabulations were run between the variables of sex, size of school, teaching level and years experience by the following variables: College Education Entry Testing, Expect to Pass Competency Test, Evaluation Assessed Teaching, Appropriate Placement on Career Ladder, Ladder Rewards Most Competent, Teacher Morale and Teacher Stress. The differences were less than the expected error rate with very few exceptions.

More females (66.2%) than males (56.5%) believed they were appropriately placed on the career ladder. This may account for the fact that more elementary teachers (68.8%) than high school teachers (59.6%) believed they were appropriately placed on the career ladder. Females are in higher ratios in the elementary grades.

Males were more dissatisfied (65%) than females (46.3) with the evaluation of their teaching performance. Fewer elementary teachers (44.5%) than either junior high teachers (55.3%) or high school teachers (54.7%) were dissatisfied with the evaluation of their teaching performance. This ties logically with the observations outlined in the previous paragraph in that females seem to express more satisfaction with the merit/ladder system in Texas.

Discussion

It is apparent that Texas teachers support the concept of competency testing for teachers. However, that support is limited to the evaluation of pre-service teachers. It does not appear that teacher opposition to the testing of current teachers grew out of a fear of failure, but was perhaps viewed more as a "breach of contract since Texas teachers held life teaching certificates.

Teachers were generally opposed to the career ladder and their opposition grew after they had experience with the system. At least part of that opposition seems to be related to a lack of confidence in the evaluation system used for teacher career ladder placement. Additionally, teachers expressed a lack of faith in the positive academic impact of the career ladder system. Teachers were even less positive about the impact after they had had experience with the system.

Of even greater concern is the impact of reform on teacher stress and morale. Teachers reported increasing stress as reform was implemented, and there can be little doubt that the stress was at least in part a function of the reform. There is also little doubt that morale was negatively impacted during the reform process. Further evidence of the decline in teacher morale was provided by teacher responses to the questions concerning recommending the profession as a career and intentions

to leave the profession before retirement. High negative responses were also reported by the Henderson study mentioned above. Not only was low morale reflected by teachers attitudes about their profession, but it was reflected by how they thought the public perceived them and their profession.

The view from the classroom of Texas Educational Reform is that it has increased stress, decreased morale and has failed to improve student achievement. Furthermore, teachers are saying the the problem goes further than the classroom. It is a societal problem with lack of community respect in general and parental support in particular.

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